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THE TACITEAN TIBERIUS A STUDY IN HISTORIOGRAPHIC METHOD

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In a course of lectures on Roman historical material, which I lately had the honor of delivering at the American School of Classical Studies in Rome, the sketch of Tiberius by Tacitus was examined at considerable length, and some conclusions were reached regarding the historiographic method adopted in its construction. The editor of this Journal having kindly intimated to me his desire to lay before his readers an outline of some of these conclusions, I gladly accept the opportunity to present a summary thereof for critical consideration by those who may happen to feel any interest therein. The necessary limitations of space compel a considerable abridgment of the argument, which is perhaps not to be lamented, especially in view of the familiarity of the educated reader with the general subject-matter.

The conclusion that the sketch of Tiberius given us in the *Annals* of Tacitus is at least to a considerable extent untrustworthy has been reached by most scholars of today whose familiarity with the subject entitles their opinions to respect. This untrustworthiness becomes very obvious if we compare the historian's generalizations with the data as given by him, out of which it might be supposed that the generalizations must have arisen. If a writer does not correctly summarize, in the form of general statements, the facts narrated by himself, we are justified in entertaining the gravest suspicions regarding his general character as a historian. Now these

disharmonies between data and generalization are constant and glaring in the *Annals*. Among others we may mention the statement regarding the fates of those whom Tiberius is said to have hated: "*omnesque, praeter Lepidum, variis mox criminibus, struente Tiberio, circumventi sunt,*" and the intimation as to the others who "*suspiciam animum perstrinxere.*"¹ But if we trace out the facts as they are given later on we find that they do not bear out these statements. So also the alleged outrageous extension by the emperor of the "*crimen majestatis*" to cover calumnious words or trivial acts turns, when we come to examine the details, into constant interventions by Tiberius to prevent this extension by quashing such proceedings.² We read in the *Annals* general assertions of "*saeva jussa, continuas accusationes, fallaces amicitias, perniciem innocentium et easdem exitu causas conjungimus, obvia rerum similitudine et satietate*"; we are told that "*ceterum ex eo praerupta jam et urgens dominatio*"; that "*at Romae caede continua*"; that "*non enim Tiberium, quanquam triennio post caedem Sejani, quae ceteros mollire solent, tempus, preces, satias, mitigabant, quin incerta vel abolita, pro gravissimis et recentibus, puniret*"; and the emperor is depicted as "*quasi aspiciens undantem per domos sanguinem, aut manus carnificum.*"³ However when we come to look into the cases on which these charges are based, and Tacitus claims to report them fully,⁴ we find this "harvest of blood" reduced to about one execution per annum on all sorts of charges, and in but few cases does Tacitus even suggest that the accused were innocent. On the other hand we find a very much larger number of cases in which Tiberius intervenes to quash harsh proceedings, cause the discharge or acquittal of the accused, or to lessen their punishment. Besides this, Tacitus tells us of mitigations of the criminal law by Tiberius from its former severity, and refusals to extend it so as to create new offenses, and of not infrequent acts of mildness and fairness.⁵ In three classes of crime, indeed, the percentages of convictions were high, viz., in cases of adultery, of bribe-taking or

¹ *Annals* i. 13.

² *Ibid.* i. 72; cf. i. 73-74; ii. 50; iii. 36, 49-50, 70; iv. 31; vi. 5, 7, 9. Only Montanus was punished, iv. 42. Euseb. *Chron. an.* 778.

³ *Annals* iv. 33; v. 3; vi. 7, 29, 38-39.

⁴ *Ibid.* iv. 32-33, 71; vi. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.* iii. 24-28, 52-56; cf. ii. 50; iii. 50, 69; iv. 6-7; vi. 5, 16-17; *et passim*.

maladministration in the provinces, and of bringing false charges of crime. The generalizations which Tacitus makes as to this last-mentioned matter of "*delatio*" are particularly inharmonious with the facts even as narrated by him. Indeed, under this "bloody tyranny," it appears to have been much safer to libel the tyrant or to be accused of high treason than to engage in bringing accusations against the tyrant's enemies; but we should not suspect this from the historian's general remarks.

Perhaps the most persistent charge that Tacitus makes is that the whole life of Tiberius was one of concealment, duplicity, and dissimulation, that there was nothing honest or straightforward about his thoughts, words, or actions. Clear language, we are told, came with difficulty from his lips: "*Tiberioque, etiam in rebus quas non occuleret, seu natura sive assuetudine, suspensa semper et obscura verba*"; and "*eo aegrius accepit recludi quae premeret*." To this charge of wilful obscurity and duplicity, Tacitus returns again and again, giving as his final example of dissimulation the endeavor of this proud old man by the strength of his indomitable will to triumph over the mortifying feebleness of extreme age now near to death—or perhaps the historian means his final instance to be the emperor's deathbed "duplicity" in seeming to die and then reviving.¹ Now we cannot pretend to the clairvoyance of Tacitus in purporting to penetrate into the secret thoughts of a long dead man, but we can compare his general allegations of inveterate duplicity of language with what he gives us as quotations of the words of Tiberius; and with the exception of a very few instances, not half a dozen in all, where the emperor acted as anyone might naturally act in keeping his opinions or intentions to himself, we shall not find in the seventy or more quotations any indications of obscurity, concealment, trickiness, or disinclination to let his auditors know what he is driving at, nor any of that difficulty on their part in understanding him which Tacitus continually keeps asserting. As to the charges that he never meant what he said nor what his actions implied, we fail to discover any basis therefor save the historian's direct intuitions, which certainly appear to be at variance with the facts given in detail and with which, it would seem, they should be in harmony.

¹ *Ibid.* i. 11; iv. 71; cf. i. 7, 33, 46, 73; iii. 16, 44, 64; iv. 31; v. 1; vi. 50-51.

An analysis of the contents of the first six books of the *Annals* seems to disclose that they are composed of clearly separable elements. In the first place there is the great mass of statements of fact, which so far as regards visible manifestations of conduct are favorable to Tiberius as a man and ruler; but to this class of facts are in most cases attached sneers, hints, innuendoes, insinuations, or assertions that the act should not be taken in its apparent and obvious significance, but that it meant something quite different. In the second place we find a small number of statements of actions by Tiberius quite inconsistent with the general mass, and highly reprehensible. The third category consists of broad and sweeping assertions regarding Tiberius' conduct and character which are not legitimate inductions from the facts of the first class, and which in some cases are not based on any facts at all appearing in the narrative, or are contradicted thereby. Either they arise out of facts not set forth; or else, as seems more probable, they are in the nature of deductions from some undisclosed premises—the same apparently as give rise to the sneers, hints, and innuendoes; or else the writing defies any logical analysis whatever.

The attitude taken by scholars in the presence of these disharmonies has varied. Until recent years it was the general custom to extend the doctrine of verbal inspiration to Tacitus, and to swallow all contradictions on the "*credo quia impossibile*" principle. Lecky refers to a certain type of mind which confronted by a manifest contradiction declares it a mystery and an occasion for faith. Now this mental attitude of sturdy credulity, while not extinct, has declined together with a belief in other miracles. Another and much less mediæval position regarding Tacitus is that taken by some eminent scholars, among whom I may mention the late Professor Pelham as giving a clear statement of it.¹ This theory is that Tacitus merely followed an established tradition regarding Tiberius, perhaps somewhat heightening the colors thereof. But with all possible respect for the supporters of this theory, we are compelled to say that it is absolutely unsupported by any legitimate foundation. The contemporaneous evidence as to Tiberius is uniformly favorable. It is said that this is due to fear or flattery, though so far as we are

¹ *Essays*, pp. 33 f.

informed no one gained anything by flattering this prince who detested flattery, while he repeatedly quashed proceedings against those who lampooned him. But for eighty years after his death, we find all sorts of writers—moralists, philosophers, publicists, satirists, and poets—who did not hesitate to speak freely about certain other Caesars, making statements about Tiberius indicating that the “established tradition” as known to them was quite different from that which this theory requires. More persuasive even than their direct statements are their casual, incidental references to him, where real opinions most surely manifest themselves, and which simply could not have been written had these authors held the Tacitean view of him. Can we suppose that Juvenal, if he had heard such stories as appear in Tacitus, would have found no tarter phrase to apply to him than a reference to his tranquil old age—“*secura senectus*”?¹ Indeed it would appear from Tacitus himself that his sources were rebellious to his general theories, since how else can we explain the preponderance in his book of statements of public actions by Tiberius contrary in character to the historian’s generalizations—statements the force and effect of which he is continually weakening by the addition of glosses and comments, hints and innuendoes. Surely he did not invent these statements so troublesome to him, he must have found them in the authorities he followed.

An explanation on which more reliance can be placed, and in which there are doubtless some elements of truth, is that the picture of Tiberius has been distorted by personal, social, and political bias—either the bias of earlier writers taken over and dressed up by Tacitus, or the bias of the historian himself, or a combination of the two. But as to the theory of the bias of earlier writers as the source of the Tacitean Tiberius, it is subject to the same weakness as the “established tradition” theory, of which indeed it is a part—it is not, in many important particulars, borne out by any extant material. Passages can be found in Seneca, Pliny, and Josephus indicating that he was not a sympathetic character and that he was severe in the matter of punishments, but a good deal more than that is needed for the purposes of this theory.

¹ Juvenal *Sat.* x. 75, 93. Cf. Philo *Leg. ad Cai.* 2, 6, 21, 26, 28; Seneca *De ben.* iv. 31; Pliny *N.H.* xiv. 28; Josephus *Ant.* xviii. 6; Plutarch *De exil.* 9; *De def. or.* 17.

As to the existence in Tacitus of a strong hatred against Tiberius, there seem to be grounds for serious doubt. Hate is a powerful mental stimulant—it takes possession of the mind, dominates it, directs it. It creates an abundance of justificatory beliefs and evidential facts and suppresses those facts which make against it. It produces in the mind a creative, transforming, and selective activity, which can be felt in all parts of its products. It diverts the mind from all mental presentations which are inharmonious to itself. Were Tacitus dominated by a real hate of sufficient intensity, for instance, to cause him to invent the Capri scandal—which is almost certainly an invention—it would have had a greater unifying power on his mind, it would have made him more consistent, more watchful for *non-sequiturs*, more keen to drop out facts which made against him, or to garble them into relevancy and consistency. It would not have been possible, in view of this writer's literary skill, had he been possessed by this passion, for us to see through the haze of his hints, innuendoes, disingenuous comments, and unsupported generalizations, and to discern behind that thin veil the lineaments of the real Tiberius, in a way that Clodius, for instance, cannot be seen in the writings of Cicero, or Claudius in the *Apokolokyntosis*. Moreover, Tacitus attributes some of the worst tyranny to the Senate and exculpates Tiberius. How then, if we reject the trustworthiness of the Tacitean picture of Tiberius, are we to explain it?

To understand such a matter as this, we must bear in mind the fact, so often inadequately realized, that there were certain respects in which ancient customs, ideals, characters, and ethical doctrines and practices differed from ours, and that these differences had a profound influence on their historiography. Adequately to deal with this subject is obviously impossible in these few pages; they can be no more than mentioned.

In the first place, Roman education from the time of the later Republic onward was devoted almost exclusively to the study of rhetoric. To use beautiful language effectively, regardless of the nature, value, or truth of the ideas conveyed by it, became a passion which dominated men throughout their lives. As Quintilian says, the literary work of a man bears the impress of his school education. Now the object of this training was frankly avowed to be the pro-

duction, not of truth, but of the imitation of truth—of verisimilitude. The result naturally was seriously to impair the feeling for veracity and sincerity; as Merivale justly says, “the pernicious effects of this solemn trifling seem to have perverted the moral sense of the Romans more speedily than even their literary style.” There was some criticism of this rhetorical education, but rather because it failed to produce really great eloquence than because it destroyed the feeling for truth.¹

Another point we must remember is that the Romans were a very free-spoken and highly censorious people and from an early period indulged habitually in scurrility, vituperation, invective, and personal abuse with a freedom and to an extent calculated to bring a blush to the cheek of the traditional Billingsgate fishwife. What is especially difficult for moderns to understand is that this kind of talk was a mere inveterate habit, “which the rhetorical education of the day encouraged and which no one took very seriously.” Cicero clearly explains that to call a man an adulterer, a pimp, a pervert, was mere outcry and abuse, intended to provoke the adversary by insult, and that it was regarded, if well done, as “facetious” and “urbane.” It was not in the least a real assertion of the truth of the matters alleged.² Indeed shocking scurrility—or what we should regard as such—was often indulged in affectionately, as by soldiers to a beloved general, possibly with an idea of averting the malevolence of Nemesis.

In some quite different fields of thought there is to be found the same habit of using words in other than their plain natural sense. Thus the Stoics argued that everyone who did not attain to the height of the “*Sapiens*” was a “*Stultus*,” and that the “*Stultus*,” not being entirely good, was entirely bad—Stoicism not admitting moral *nuances*—and consequently possessed every vice *in posse* if not *in esse*. Being a potential rake, debauchee, coward, and traitor, he might be so stigmatized.³ This same method of justifying the ascription of every vice to those who held erroneous speculative opinions passed on to Christianity, and the Fathers agreed that

¹ Quintilian ix. 2. 81; ii. 17. 26 f., 39; v. 12. 22; Cicero *De off.* ii. 14; Seneca *Epist.* 40, 45, 48, 49, 52, 82; Petronius 1–4, 46; Tacitus *Dial.* 26, 29, 31–35.

² Cicero *Pro Coel.* 3, 13.

³ Seneca *De ben.* iv. 26–27; cf. Quintilian xii. 1. 23.

pagans or heretics might properly be charged with every sin and crime, however invisible, because idolatry implied them all.

The lack of any grasp of scientific principles was another characteristic of the Romans which must be kept in view. Without any clear idea of the uniformity of natural phenomena or of the nature of causation, they were vague and inexact in observation, and relied in reasoning mainly on sophistries and fallacies, on happy phrases and verbal juggles. Most striking is their apparent blindness to contradictions, either in themselves or in others. The juxtaposition of mutually exclusive propositions did not seem to shock them or even to attract their attention, and they rarely seem even to be aware of incongruities between statements about facts and the facts themselves.

In view of all this, we are not surprised that their notions on veracity were very loose. Perfectly shameless mendacity characterized nearly all of them. Cicero, who was no doubt above the average in character, was an inveterate liar. Quintilian, also a virtuous man, makes his *Institutes of Oratory* in great part a treatise on Lying as a Fine Art.¹ Eusebius, for instance, has a chapter in his *Praeparatio Evangelica* on the "Use of Falsehood for the Benefit of Those Who Need It"; and most of the Fathers regarded it as a valuable medicine in their ethical pharmacopœia.²

The leading Romans for centuries used religion in political warfare as a scheme with which to trick the people, and the pagan gods were represented as frequently practicing mendacity. What is less generally known is that most of the Christian Fathers did not hesitate to attribute mendacity to God and to Jesus,³ while curiously enough Christian legends always represent the devil as trustworthy and veracious. Such facts are highly significant in view of the fact that men's moral ideas may be seen in the character they ascribe to their gods.

¹ Cicero *Ad fam.* ii. 16; cf. *De orat.* ii. 59; *De off.* ii. 14; *Brut.* 11. No doubt the impossibility of relying on an enemy's parole was one reason for the Proscriptions. Quintilian ii. 17. 26-39; iv. 2. 89-94; 123-24; *ibid.* 7. 1 f.; xii. 1. 1-14, 34-45; *ibid.* 7. 7.

² Cf. Jerome *Epist.* xlviii. 13; lii; John Chrysostom *De sacerd.* i. 6-8; Clem. Alex. *Strom.* vii. 9.

³ E.g., Ambrose *De fide* v. 16-18; Jerome *Epist.* xlviii. 13; Hilary *De Trin.* ix. 62-75; Gregory I *Moral.* xxxiii. 7, 9; cf. Harnack *Hist. of Dogma* III, 307; V, 264.

It is evident that persons whose education was mainly devoted to rhetoric and who remained all their lives vastly enamored of beautiful language, and furthermore who were frankly and freely mendacious, though regarding a good reputation for honesty a valuable asset on occasions when one wishes to deceive¹—it is evident that such persons will approach the writing of history with somewhat different ideas from those which we regard as suitable. So indeed we find it. Historiography was generally regarded as a branch of oratory, and that mendacious inventions might properly be used therein seems to have been conceded. Cicero calls them “*mendaciuncula*” and cites Panaetius, the gravest of Stoic philosophers, to justify his liberality of view.² Some, like Plutarch and Diodorus, held history to have for its aim the enforcing of moral truths. Quintilian, after defining the aim of poetry as that of giving pleasure, which aim it pursues by the invention of pleasing falsehoods, declares that history borders on poetry and indeed may be said to be poetry unfettered by meter; and in another passage seems not to doubt that historians make use of their “poetic license.” Aelius Aristides puts history somewhere between oratory and poetry.³

So well was all this understood that none of the ancients—although they often asserted their own veracity—seem to have had much confidence in the historical writings of others. Polybius speaks of the inextricable maze of falsehood into which his predecessors had fallen; Sallust is skeptical about many of the stories as to Catiline; Josephus asserts that the histories of Nero and of those before him are full of mendacity; Tacitus declares that after the battle of Actium true history ceased to be written, and comments most severely on the worthless character of what passes for the history of the early Empire—a judgment in which Cassius Dio fully concurs, adding that much that has been written is false and almost every incident has been distorted. Vopiscus defends a contemporary against a charge of inaccuracy by claiming that Tacitus and all the great historians have made misstatements; whereat the critic

¹ Quintilian xii. 1. 12.

² *De orat.* ii. 59; *De off.* ii. 14; *Brut.* 11; cf. *Ad fam.* v. 12; *Ad Att.* iv. 6; Sallust *Cat.* 14, 22.

³ Quintilian x. 1. 28–31; ii. 4. 18–19; Ael. Arist. *Panath. disc.* ii. 513.

graciously yields and admits that one may with an easy conscience indulge in mendacity in company with these masters of historical composition. Lucian, the belated rationalist, deploras the inability of writers to distinguish between history and oratory, or even between history and poetry.¹ Similar expressions of skepticism are to be found in almost every writer. As Cotter Morrison well says, "The old masters of history resembled . . . the old masters of painting. Both thought little of what we call 'local color,' of close conformity to the scene and object delineated, provided they produced striking compositions with grand outlines and rich tints, which were attractive and beautiful for their own sake."

When we take into consideration the foregoing elements of Roman life, the exclusively rhetorical education, and the craze for it which pervaded Roman society—and Tacitus was a skilled orator, devoted to it from his youth—the generally loose ideas as to veracity and the blindness to contradictions, the lax views as to the duties and obligations of a historian, as well as the opinions of the Romans on the harmony between their historians' practices and these lax views, the hypothesis arises that the *Annals* may be an example of historical writing done according to the method of the rhetorician, and that this is the true explanation of those disharmonies, which are not explicable on the theories that Tacitus told the truth, or followed an established tradition, or that a strong bias against Tiberius entered into the composition thereof. Now it would contribute very greatly to establish this hypothesis if an examination of the settled rules of rhetorical composition and of Tacitus showed indications that he followed them carefully in detail.

By the time of Tacitus the labors of many generations of rhetoricians had reduced that art to a science, a kind of applied psychology, at which the moderns should not sneer, since it has deluded most of them. Fortunately we have an elaborate treatise on this matter by Quintilian who was the leading Roman educator during the years of Tacitus' youth, and whose precepts and doctrines, whether or not the future historian received, as some have thought,

¹ E.g., Josephus *Ant.* xx. 8. 3, 11; Tacitus *Ann.* i. 1; *Hist.* i. 1; Cassius Dio liii. 19; liv. 15; lxi. 8, 11; Vopiscus *Vit. Prob.* 1; *Vit. Aur.* 2; Lucian *Scrip. hist.* 7 *et passim*. Cf. Lucian *Hermotimus* and *Philopseudes*, *passim*.

his education from him, may be taken to represent the rules of rhetoric as they existed at the time when Tacitus was acquiring his mastery of them. Let us see, then, whether the maxims of this artful science find expression in the *Annals*.

1. *The color*.—Historical narration, being treated as if it were the narrative part of an oration, must possess the unity which belongs to a work of art; a general "color" must infuse it and unify it, making it organic and hence artistic. This general "color" or conception of the characters should pervade the whole treatment and tint each fact set forth.¹ To allow the underlying ideas to be controlled and modified by the natural color of each fact would not be art. In adopting a general color as to a person, what one does is to select some ideal typical character—e.g., the miser, the lover, the hero, the coward—and then bring the person chosen into harmony with this "type." It is much easier mental work and produces much neater results to deduce a person's qualities from a selected type, than to observe and discriminate the actual manifestations thereof in acts, and thence induce the general picture; and this method is still in high favor among nearly all men. We may recognize modern types upon which much character-drawing is built in the "plutocrat," the "honest farmer," the "rum-seller," and many others. We find in ancient writers frequent recognitions of the fact that episodes are invented to fit the characters ascribed to individuals, as according to Tacitus was done in the case of Tiberius and Sejanus.²

Now a type that had long been in high favor with rhetoricians was that of the "Tyrant"—the person, in the original meaning of the word, who deprived the aristocracy of its special privileges. The Romans took this over from the Greeks along with the rest of their rhetoric, and with the Roman love of invective and the aristocratic detestation of tyrants—for the emperors were technically tyrants in that they deprived the nobles of their right of plundering the world—the denunciation of tyrants flourished mightily. The schools rang with declamations against them and tyrannicide was evidently in

¹ Quintilian iv. 2. 94 *et passim*; Seneca *Controv.* i. 3. 9; ii. 7. 4 f.; ii. 1. 24 f. Cf. Boissier *Tacite*, pp. 211–12.

² *Annals* iv. 11; cf. p. 274, n. 1.

high favor with Quintilian.¹ *Ex hypothesi*, there were no good tyrants, and the elements composing the character of the "Tyrant" were long definitely established as Cruelty, Injustice, Suspiciousness, Craftiness, and Sensuality, from which followed naturally horrible Anguish of Soul. These characteristics were as well established conventions as with us are the benevolence of Santa Claus, the depravity of the Politician, and the greed of the Capitalist.

Now for reasons upon which we can only speculate, perhaps because of bitterness resulting from suppressed fear and indignation under Domitian, perhaps because he wished to rid himself of the taint of his profitable subservience to this monarch, perhaps because he found, as he said, that "muck-raking" writings were eagerly read, perhaps because he felt like his friend Pliny² that the proper way to show your loyal appreciation of a sympathetic prince like Trajan was to hate and denounce his predecessors as tyrants, with the conclusion understood that the reigning sovereign was exempt from this blame, perhaps because physical ailments soured him as he grew older, his writings became progressively more bitter. Tacitus seems to have constructed this sort of a logical framework for his sketch of Tiberius: viz., the major premise consisted of the typical Tyrant, possessing the qualities assigned him by the rhetorical conventions: all Tyrants are cruel, unjust, suspicious, crafty, and sensual, and ultimately experience anguish of soul. The minor premise was: Tiberius was a Tyrant. The conclusion was the general "color" that Tiberius had the qualities mentioned and experienced the due anguish. With this framework he proceeded to construct his narrative.

2. *Argumentation*.—To argument, in our sense of the word, rhetoric paid little attention. The method of rhetorical narration was not to argue but boldly to assert, and to persist in asserting—"asseveratio et perseverantia"—and above all things, be bold. History is written to tell a tale, not to demonstrate it—"ad narrandum non ad probandum."³ We may note that the modern psychologists assert that this is the sound psychological method of persuasion.

¹ Quintilian xii. 1. 40; Juvenal vii. 151; Tacitus *Dial.* 35; cf. Reure *De Scriptorum ac Litterarum Hominum cum Romanis Imperatoribus Inimicitiiis*—a most valuable little book.

² *Hist.* i. 1; Pliny *Pan.* 53.

³ Quintilian iv. 2. 94 f., 103, 108; v. 13. 15, 22; x. 1. 31.

3. *Appeals to passion*.—In place of argument great stress was laid by the writers on appeals to the feelings or passions of those whom one wishes to persuade. This is the greatest glory of the art, says Cicero, and Quintilian urges his disciples frequently to keep their narratives sufficiently embellished to stir up the feelings of the auditors, for the chief power of the rhetorician lies in exaggeration and disparagement.¹ For this purpose one should have "purple patches" ready at hand to interject into his narrative, so as to liven it up, catch the attention, stimulate the emotions, and gain the sympathy of those whom one addresses. These prepared passages had various names depending on their length and character and much was written about them, but this need not detain us.²

These bits of embellishment, of course, say our guides, should artfully be made to appear artless, and here as elsewhere all bias and prepossession must be carefully concealed. To this end it may be valuable to feign an air of doubt, and it is here that a good reputation for gravity and uprightness is valuable.³ We may note the frequency with which Tacitus protests his veracity and impartiality, and gives an appearance of scrupulous fairness by expressions of skepticism regarding some more than usually improbable story of which we have no trace elsewhere. At times he almost seems to be defending Tiberius.⁴

4. *Personal attacks*.—When you wish to attack a person who stands well, says Cicero, it is safer at first to conceal your intentions and subtly to undermine him. After having propitiated the minds of your auditors it may be well to deny that you are going to attack the other party, so as not openly to seem so to do, but yet go on doing it cautiously and gradually alienate their favorable disposition toward that person, and in some way bring him into unpopularity, hatred, or contempt. Irrelevant things may be brought in if they will arouse prejudice, and you may refer to his relatives or the

¹ Quintilian ii. 17. 26–29; iv. 2, *passim*; iv. 5. 5–6; viii. 3. 89; *ibid.* 4, *passim*; ix. 3. 27; Cicero *De orat.* iii. 25–27; ii. 53; *De rhet. inv.* i. 16; Dion Chrys. *Orat.* xi.

² Quintilian ii. 4. 21 f.; viii. 5, *passim*; Cicero *De rhet. inv.* ii. 16; see note 1, *supra*; Seneca *Controv.* i. 1. 3, 7; ii. Praef. 1; vii. 5; ix. 5. Cf. examples in *Annals*, e.g., iii. 33, 65; vi. 6, 19, 22, 39–40, 50, *ad finem*.

³ Quintilian iv. 2. 57, 117; ix. 2. 19, 65 f.; x. 3. 184; xii. 1. 11–13; Cicero *De rhet. inv.* i. 17; ii. 16.

⁴ E.g., *Annals* i. 1, 76; iv. 11.

circumstances of his past life. Touch lightly the points favorable to him—lay stress on the unfavorable. If it cannot be shown that he has committed any wrong or even been suspected thereof, it is well to suggest that he formerly concealed his wickedness, or that he had no opportunity to manifest his evil disposition, or had some reason to refrain from evil acts.¹ This passage of the great model of Roman literary men might be taken to be a summary of the introduction of Tiberius to the reader of the *Annals*. Tacitus first professes his detachment and impartiality, concealing the savage arraignment which is to come. Augustus is represented as craftily founding a despotism on the ruins of liberty, by cajoling the army and people and destroying all opponents. It is suggested that he caused Hirtius and Pansa to be murdered, that he unpatriotically destroyed Cassius and Brutus from hate, that he falsely betrayed Sextus Pompey and Lepidus, and insidiously ensnared Antony. After Actium, says Tacitus, there was peace, but a bloody peace. At Rome there were the murders of the Varrones, the Egnatii, and the Juli—rather strong, these plurals, for the execution of one Egnatius in 19 B.C. and one Varro in 22 B.C. in due course of law, and the suicide of one Julius in 2 B.C. to escape trial for his adultery with Julia. In regard to Tiberius' mother Livia, he says that upon the death of their father Agrippa, the boys Caius and Lucius Caesar were cut off by natural death, or by the arts of their stepmother Livia. “*Ut*” with the perfect indicative seems also rather strong for periods of fourteen and sixteen years between the deaths of Agrippa and of his children, and the hint seems hardly fair when we consider that the boys, who had been for years conveniently near Livia, died in distant parts of the Empire. But even worse is the hint that Livia poisoned Augustus, the husband with whom she had lived in harmony for fifty-two years.²

The stainless and austere private life, the long years of arduous public service, the brilliant military and civil career of Tiberius are not mentioned, though his two consulates and two triumphs—all abundantly earned—are sneeringly referred to as “*congestos juveni*

¹ Cicero *De rhet. inv.* i. 16–17, 21, 24–25; ii. 8–17. Cf. *Ad Herennium* i. 7.

² Hints of murders chargeable to Livia appear frequently; see *Annals* i. 3, 5–6, 10; iii. 3, 19; iv. 57, 71; when v. 1 was penned, the author did not seem to have these in mind.

consulatus triumphos”; but it is said that he was proud and had given many indications of a cruel nature; and we are confidently told that while at Rhodes he “*meditated* nothing but vengeance, deceptions, and secret sensualities.” The historian in writing later that up to the death of Augustus, Tiberius was “*egregium vita famaue*,” seems to indicate that these meditations were unknown until somehow revealed over a century later.¹ Tiberius’ advancement to the Empire is ascribed to the secret machinations of Livia or her open domination over the aged emperor;—she was not far from his age. In another place, indeed, Tacitus says that Augustus had fully settled on Tiberius as his successor in 11 B.C.,² and he definitely adopted him in 4 A.D. and associated him in the government of the Empire. Then there is a hint that Augustus regarded him as infamous and base and was intending to elevate the insane Agrippa Postumus, and it is also intimated that there was some irregularity about the assumption of authority by Tiberius after Augustus’ death, and about his orders to the soldiers, though there is no question that this was quite within his legal military powers. His prompt acquiescence in the wishes of the Senate is stigmatized by the phrase “*arroganti moderatione*,” and it is suggested that there was some grave impropriety in his stationing a guard at the time of the funeral procession of Augustus. Nothing very important is said, nothing very precise is asserted in all this introduction, but by use of the method indicated by Cicero the ordinary reader of the *Annals* is prepared to expect any sort of acts natural to a secret debauchee and a mean and brutal tyrant.

5. *Dealing with hostile facts*.—This disingenuousness in undermining a person’s character was not limited to introductory matter. The rules of rhetoric as to the handling of facts which are incongruous to the writer’s prepossession are most instructive. It should be borne in mind that these rules had been built up in relation to forensic oratory where there was an opponent present, but historiography, being regarded as in the nature of the narrative part of an oration, was conducted by its oratorical writers in accordance with them. Now it was laid down that to pass over a known fact when it was hostile to your general contention, would be in effect

¹ *Annals* i. 4; cf. vi. 51.

² *Ibid.* iii. 56; cf. iv. 57.

to admit it, while to deny its existence or grossly to misstate it would be highly dangerous; and hence the student is cautioned against injudicious suppressions thereof.¹ We have observed the curious fact that Tacitus' narrative is full of detailed statements of fact hostile to his general theory, and now we get the explanation of it.

It is laid down that the proper procedure is to admit these troublesome elements into the narrative, but in some way to destroy their effect.² Of course some things are better treated by general language boldly and confidently used, sometimes with an affectation of contempt, and students are warned against too meticulous attempts to wipe out every adverse fact.³ Where this kind of treatment will not do, there are other methods of meeting the situation. As we have seen above, Cicero suggests manipulating the emphasis, arousing prejudice by introducing irrelevancies, and suggesting that the person in question concealed his past misdeeds, or had no opportunity to commit them, or had good reasons to refrain from them. This method of denaturalizing facts was used by the great orator himself, for instance in explaining his relations with Catiline, and with Dolabella,⁴ and seems to have been a favorite expedient with Roman orators when they got their imaginary constructions too much at variance with known facts. It is the keynote of Tacitus' attempt to explain his own incongruities and disharmonies. From the first day of Tiberius' reign, when he appeared to be modest and deferential to the Senators so as to penetrate, says the historian, into their designs and warp their words and looks into crimes—though we are told of no cases of the sort—on through his acquittals of accused—against whom, it is said, he secretly raged—or his pardoning or quashing proceedings against them, lest his wicked character be discovered—up to the last chapter where his reasons for never saying what he meant, and rarely doing what his wicked heart desired, are said to be his fear, or consideration, or regard for his stepfather, for his son, for his nephew, for his mother, or for Sejanus—in all parts of the work we have Cicero's precepts applied by Tacitus *ad nauseam*. There is not much consistency in all this delirious psychology. Sometimes, we are told, he hesitated only when it had to do with

¹ Quintilian iv. 2. 66–67, 76–78.

³ *Ibid.* v. 13. 22, 36–37, 51.

² *Ibid.* v. 13. 7 f., 37.

Cicero *Pro Coel.* 4–6; *Phil.* xi. 1–4.

the Senate, or again when he was not acting as an advocate; again we are told it was all feigned; again, that his mind was naturally ever irresolute and perplexed (a victim of *aboulia*?); again that he was actuated by subtle policy; again because he liked to deceive. Cicero's suggestion is certainly used most amply.¹

Other ways of lessening the effect of troublesome facts are laid down. Much can be done by cleverly handling the facts narrated, changing the order, juggling the words or telling them somewhat differently. A judicious use of vituperation, pathos, wit, or ridicule may carry us over thin ice, and an epigram may often serve as the vehicle of invective. A very safe thing is to dwell on the atrocity of the act. An accuser will always insist that everything bad that was done was the result of deliberate wickedness and cruelty, while the good acts were done for some selfish object and not out of good-will. In the field of motives, the rhetorician has full swing. A great deal can be effected by a careful choice of words to give color and character to an act; as for instance we may call a somewhat disingenuous man, a thief, or a woman who has committed an impropriety a harlot, etc.² We have already mentioned illustrations of this in the *Annals*.

6. *Hints and innuendoes*.—Indeed a great reliance of the rhetorician seems to have been on some kind or other of hint, or innuendo, so as to awaken suspicion and lead to a discrediting of that part of the evidence which makes against the rhetorician. Besides the methods suggested above, there is the one highly commended by Quintilian and effectively practiced by Cicero—that of describing vividly the enemy's personal appearance, how he was inflamed with wickedness and fury, how his eyes glared, how cruelty showed itself over his whole countenance. In making these word pictures, says Quintilian, it is permissible to invent details, and he further tells us that while in earlier times these purple bits were generally put forth distinctly as imaginative, in his day they were treated as actual occurrences. With more boldness still one may give to his discourse wonderful effectiveness, says Quintilian, by displaying the thoughts

¹ *Annals* i. 7, 46–47, 74, 80; ii. 65–66; iv. 31; vi. 30, 51. Ferrero seems in his last book to lean to the *aboulia* theory.

² Cicero *De rhet. inv.* i. 16, 21; ii. 16, 36; *De orat.* ii. 53, 59; Quintilian iv. 2. 52, 76–77, 80, 83; vi. 3, *passim*; viii. 1 f.; ix. 2. 93.

of an adversary as he might declare them himself.¹ Here we find laid down the rules which so strikingly characterize the treatment of Tiberius in the *Annals*. As we have seen, the great mass of the bare facts narrated, stripped of disguises, either contradict or at least fail to give support to Tacitus' theory, but to nearly every such fact is attached a gloss, or comment, or assertion, or interpretation suggesting that the act as regards Tiberius, however fair it seemed, was in reality base or contemptible; all this is done with sufficient art and skill to prevent the ordinary reader from giving the natural interpretation and due weight to the facts. These additions are not parts of the events narrated; they are either mere assertions, sneers, or descriptions of facial expressions—even when Tiberius was in Capri—or allegations contradicted by other facts, or private conversations which could hardly have been known, or inner motives, thoughts, desires, intentions, or feelings, which Tacitus or whoever invented them could have discovered only by direct intuition.² In fact they are undoubtedly deductions from the historian's pre-established "color" or general theory used according to the rules of rhetoric to break the force of the great mass of material so rebellious to the picture he set out to draw; yet being set forth in biting and striking phrases, they have been ordinarily taken to be facts out of which the generalizations were obtained by induction, and the real facts, more soberly stated, have passed out of the dazzled minds of most readers. Space does not permit me to do more than to refer to some samples of these cases in the foregoing notes, or to cases cited in earlier pages.

7. *Invention of episodes*.—But the foregoing expedients were not the only ones suggested by the rhetoricians, and practiced by Tacitus.

¹ Quintilian ix. 2. 29 f., 40–44; viii. 3. 70; iv. 2. 123–24; iii. 8. 49 f. Cicero *In Verr.* v. 62; cf. *Pro Milo.* 32.

² *Mere assertions*: e.g., *Annals* i. 75; iii. 3, 8; cf. i. 6, 53; iii. 16, 44; vi. 23, 25, 26. *Sneers*: i. 74, 80; ii. 38, 52, 84; iii. 12; iv. 8, 9, 38. This last example is very feeble work. *Facial expressions*: ii. 29; iii. 15, 16, 44; iv. 34; vi. 9. *Statements elsewhere contradicted*: i. 72, 74 (cf. ii. 27); ii. 50; iii. 44 (cf. iv. 6–7); iv. 29 (cf. *ibid.* 30); vi. 30 (cf. *ibid.* 8), 38. So also the assertion in i. 13 as to the slaughter of enemies, see *passim*, and nearly all the generalizations. *Private conversations*: i. 3, 6, 69; iii. 15; iv. 3, 7, 17, 39; vi. 21, 26, 46. *Inner thoughts, feelings, etc.*: e.g., i. 4, 7, 11, 14, 52; ii. 52; iii. 64; iv. 1, 31; v. 2; vi. 13, 40, 46; and at least forty other places. The secret thoughts of Livia, Sejanus, and even of Haterius, Nerva, etc., are also well known; e.g., iii. 3; iv. 3, 12; vi. 4, 26, etc.

We sometimes need—and it is quite permissible—of course to accomplish virtuous ends—to insert pure inventions, false statements; so says Quintilian. These must be carefully fabricated so as to seem probable, and if possible be connected with something which is true. They should not contradict one another, or what is acknowledged to be true, nor should they be liable to easy disproof. It is well to have them as far as possible free from effective contradiction, as, for instance, by basing them on one's own knowledge, or on that of a dead man. Cicero says that the truth of the matter is of no importance, provided an air of verisimilitude is obtained, and they be done with boldness so as to catch the attention. That these were common enough in historical writings we have seen in the foregoing pages, and there are but very few cases of any sort of a writer being as scrupulous as Seneca showed himself in admitting that his imagination sometimes triumphed over his veracity.¹

Tacitus certainly does not; yet we can be reasonably certain that he did not refrain from availing himself of the foregoing expedient. It is possible for us with reasonable certainty to pick out some of these products of the rhetorician's art inserted in the course of the narrative to support the general "color" he has adopted. Real events have antecedents and consequences, they are interconnected by innumerable bonds of cause and effect; speaking generally they cannot be left out without there being any trace of their omission, nor can they be inserted without some indication. The patch shows. Real events do not suddenly happen and then become as if they had never existed, leaving no trace in the mind of contemporaries, nor apparently in that of the narrator himself, while subsequent events continue to occur as they could not have done had the episode in question been a real one.

For instance, the eleven years' orgy on Capri may be classed as one of this sort. Passing by the fact that there is no hint of it in any writer prior to Tacitus—and indeed most of them use language which would have been impossible had such an event occurred—we find enough to condemn it in Tacitus himself. It has no relation to anything told of Tiberius' past life, save the statement of what he

¹ Quintilian iv. 2. 19, 88-94, 101, 123-24; Cicero *De orat.* ii. 59; *De rhet. inv.* i. 16, 21, 29; ii. 16; Seneca *De ben.* i. 10; *De tranq. an.* 15; *Epist.* 97.

thought about in Rhodes thirty years before. Tacitus tells us that Tiberius hated vices, "*vitia oderat*," that free livers dreaded correction by a prince who lived with ancient austerity, and that he was severe against all forms of debauchery. His friends and associates were men of gravity and in the suite who accompanied him to Capri there is no mention of others than learned and decent men.¹ No scandal is charged against him by Tacitus, or by anyone else, in all his life up to his retirement to Capri when aged sixty-seven. It would seem that in locating this purple story at Capri where Tiberius was living in strict retirement, and where consequently the known details of his life must have been few, Tacitus is following the precept above quoted, to make your inventions such as are least likely to be easily contradicted. This is observable in other cases.² The hypothesis of some terrible senile insanity cannot be accepted in view of the fact that such a psychosis would unquestionably have caused, or have been accompanied by, a physical and mental collapse in a very much shorter time than eleven years; yet Tacitus describes him to us at the end of his life as still energetic in looks and speech, and strong in intellect, and but a few days before his death, at the age of seventy-eight, exhibiting clearness of mind and strength of will.³ The general charge that he abandoned public affairs and spent his time in debauchery is wholly inconsistent with the repeated references to his active oversight of governmental matters.⁴ Although Tacitus gives us so many details with names and places as to the emperor's acts in regard to comparatively tame matters, he leaves vague and indefinite the general accusation of the brutal seizures of high-born children; yet any one of these acts, if true, would be far richer in harrowing details harmonious to Tacitus' purposes, than any other thing that he narrated.⁵ Even more surprising is Tacitus' failure to make the natural, obvious, appropriate, indeed the necessary and unavoidable comments which must have followed his statement, referring to the last year of Tiberius, that he was desirous of standing well with posterity. Indeed in many other places

¹ *Annals* i. 80; ii. 50, 85; iii. 52; iv. 14, 20, 42, 58; v. 3; vi. 26, 27.

² E.g., *Annals* iii. 16, 44.

³ *Annals* vi. 50; cf. *ibid.* 46.

⁴ *Ibid.* iv. 67; cf. iv. 70, 71, 75; v, vi, *passim*.

⁵ *Ibid.* vi. 1. At vi. 7 he asserts that he proposes to spare us no horrors.

Tacitus passes over opportunities for stinging comments, of which it is hardly possible that such a master of bitter phrase could have failed to avail himself, had he held the Capri orgy in mind as authentic material.¹

It is probable that most of the material for the Capri tale was derived from the long discredited and forgotten scandals circulated in Rome by Julia and her lovers during the retirement of Tiberius to Rhodes, 6 B.C. and after, in their endeavor to discredit him and perhaps compass his destruction. The statements as to military and political events made by Suetonius (xli) as happening during the Capri residence are flatly untrue as to the years 26-37 A.D., but are substantially correct if referred to the Rhodian retirement, and the poem quoted by the same writer (lix) is clearly from the earlier time. But space forbids me to set forth here the arguments for this hypothesis.

An extremely instructive comparison may be made, in this matter of the detection of invented episodes, between the story of Nero's singing on the stage, which has the marks of a real fact—the relations with past and future events—and the yarn as to his obscene public atrocities, which has all the characteristics of a dream episode emerging from the inane, and being forgotten when the sleeper wakes; but this lies somewhat beyond the scope and the necessary brevity of this paper.

One example of the way Tacitus manages his general narrative will perhaps be sufficient to enable us to see how this kind of history is written. The government, we are told, had assumed the character of a furious and crushing despotism, and the historian declares from time to time that he has to record only savage mandates, incessant accusations, faithless friendships, the ruin of the innocent, and cases all with the same result. Gloomily he refers to the continual destruction of citizens, the glut of blood, trivial charges punished as heinous crimes, the remorseless tyrant, who, having left for a moment his Capri villanies and rape of children, is lurking about the suburbs of Rome to gaze upon the torrent of blood.² These generalizations are quite at variance with the facts as given in detail,

¹ *Ibid.* vi. 46; cf. iii. 52-54; iv. 36-38; vi. 9, 23-26.

² *Ibid.* iv. 33; v. 3; vi. 1, 29, 38, 39.

but impress most readers' minds more strongly than the scattered facts; for they rely on the author to digest details and furnish them with inductions.

Now the foregoing elements furnish the "color," the appeal to passion, the vivid narrative recommended to awaken hatred and horror. Let us then examine a connected sketch, say the first few chapters of the sixth book, the bloodiest period of this furious tyranny. It leads off with a terrible passage touching with brief but highly colored phrases on the duplicity, tyranny, continuous orgy, and shame at his villainies and lust of the septuagenarian on Capri. Then follows a letter from Tiberius containing some ironical but courteous and good-humored chaffing of the Senate over a silly resolution it had adopted for giving him a bodyguard of twenty armed Senators—it is agreed by all that Tiberius detested flattery and servility. But a proposition to give the praetorian soldiers front seats at the theater is sharply disapproved—surely not unreasonably—by the emperor as *ultra vires*, and as an attempt to interfere with military discipline and so promote sedition and discord. The originator of the project, a rhetorician, was expelled from the Senate and later from Italy, and later still, "*custoditur domibus magistratuum.*" Then a dangerous plotter and informer, an old tool of Sejanus, is denounced and he in turn denounces another of the same sort. Both are condemned to some unspecified punishment to the great satisfaction of the Senate and apparent entire approval of Tacitus. One of them is executed later on for this or other offenses; the fate of the other does not appear. The consuls of the previous year had quarreled and made violent charges against one another. Haterius prosecuted them for not backing up their charges. One threatened to impeach the other before the emperor, but a request was made by a consular, not improbably on behalf of Tiberius, that the whole thing be dropped; thus the matter ended. To relieve the tameness, Tacitus, à propos of nothing, throws in an innuendo against Tiberius by suggesting the narrow escape of these persons from destruction at the hands of the tyrant, and by setting forth the atrocious meditations and the debauched character of Haterius, which insured him safety from the cruelty of that prince. Thus the real facts are quite lost sight of and the rhetorical color supported.

Then another person is accused of a multitude of crimes including sneers at the monarch. The Senate convicts him, but on appeal Tiberius quashes the proceedings, writing the Senate to beg them that "words maliciously distorted and the freedom of convivial conversation might not be twisted into crimes." But evidently this will never do; something must be done to save the situation; for his theory, repeated in the next chapter, is that under Tiberius a mere careless word was a crime; so he inserts the innuendo that the escape of this person is due to his flagitious but useful services to the tyrant, and then breaks into the flow of the narrative with some highly improbable assertions about alleged statements by Tiberius of his confusion of mind and terrible anguish of soul, and some rhetorical reflections on this as a just retribution for his atrocities, and on the laceration of tyrants' hearts in general by their cruelty, lust, and manifold wickedness. This passage is a rhetorical commonplace, which we find in Tacitus' contemporaries and as far back at least as Plato.¹ Then he takes up the narrative again with a mention of the punishment by the Senate of the delator in the foregoing case.

Next after this, Tiberius causes to be put on trial before the Senate two persons for crimes which Tacitus does not specify. They, being convicted, make accusations against two other persons. Tacitus breaks into his narrative twice in this chapter, once to indulge in rhetoric on the terrible plague of delation and prosecutions for trivial words, though his facts show that delation was very hazardous and that trivial words entailed no punishment; and again to assert that he, differing from most writers, will not omit any of these melancholy recitals of sufferings, however painful it may be. But he has told us nothing very bad so far. However, he omits altogether telling us what really happened to these four men. We suspect that if anything very serious had happened he would not have omitted it.

Then there is recounted the trial of a man on the nonsensical charge of having been a friend of Sejanus. The accused very properly says in effect, "Certainly, I was following the emperor's example." He is at once joyously acquitted, and his accusers for this and other crimes are condemned; but Tacitus is vague as to the punishment,

¹ *Annals* vi. 6. Cf. *Dion Chrys. Orat.* vi; *Persius* iii. 35 f.; *Plato Rep.* ix. 6; *Gorgias* §§ 55, 170 f.

"exilio aut morte." I am inclined to suspect that this whole episode is a rhetorical exercise, to blame Tiberius for Sejanus' oppressive acts. The speech purports to be delivered in the emperor's presence, but he was not in Rome during this time.

Next comes the case of a man who committed suicide because Tiberius withdrew from him the hospitalities of the imperial table on account of his scurrilous writings against the emperor's adopted son. Tacitus seems sympathetic to the victim. Perhaps this is a "mandate of despotism."

Following this, five well-connected persons at once were charged with treason. The Senators gave an anticipatory shiver—but prematurely—since two were acquitted and the trial of the others was ordered by the emperor to be indefinitely postponed, and nothing more is heard of them. The innuendo however appears that Tiberius, though still in Capri, exhibited ominous tokens of displeasure—*"tristibus notis"*—against one of the accused. Two years later this person was involved in other charges, including adultery, and committed suicide.

The narrative is again getting rather tame for a reign of *"undantem per domos sanguinem,"* and even with the *"tristibus notis"* will hardly stir the reader; so our rhetorician, according to the rules of his art, proceeds to "stimulate our emotions" and administer a shock by the information that "not even women were exempt from danger. With designs to usurp the empire they could not be charged; so their tears were made a crime and the aged Vitia, mother of Fufius Geminus, was executed because she wept over the slaughter of her son." It appears from Cassius Dio that Fufius committed suicide two years before, but no writer anywhere gives any hint of such a monstrous act of illegal brutality as that which Tacitus here mentions, nor does Tacitus add anything anywhere to elucidate this passage. *Credat Judæus Apella.*

Now the unembellished facts we have reviewed, which cover about one-sixth of the accusations set forth by Tacitus for the reign, show that of the twenty cases—omitting the Vitia story, which, even if true, is expressly charged upon the Senate—in nine of them the result was acquittal, abandonment, or quashing of the proceedings, or indefinite postponement amounting to abandonment, and in most

of the cases the moderating influence proceeds from the "bloody tyrant." In one case a Senator is expelled and exiled. In four cases there were convictions but no indication is given of the nature, or even of the fact of sentence. In three cases delators were convicted of false accusations and other crimes, but their sentences are uncertain. In two cases there were convictions of men who were odious as delators, and two years later we hear of the execution of one of them. These two condemnations seem to Tacitus, or his sources, fully merited, and he does not deny the guilt of any of the others.

Besides these, one Senator is pleasantly chaffed and one satirist is forbidden the emperor's table. No claim is made that any innocent person was convicted. Yet by the author's skilful use of about a dozen invented passages, innuendoes, and declarations of secret thoughts made according to the rules of rhetoric, the general effect of the recital on ordinary readers, and on some scholars, is to make them forget the tame facts and remember the striking embellishments; and the impression produced is that one is reading the record of a bloody tyranny. The mastery of unscrupulous persuasion developed in ancient writers by a sedulous and almost exclusive devotion to rhetorical studies, based on a sound empiric psychology, has during all the succeeding centuries filled the world with a mass of distorted, contradictory, and impossible stories in all branches of human thought. When even today so justly eminent a scholar as Dr. Rhodes thinks that he finds in Tacitus "diligence, accuracy, love of truth and impartiality, . . . truthfulness and fairness in the narrative," we cannot sneer at rhetoric. It may seem poor enough stuff when analyzed, but it did its work to the confusion of historical knowledge, and in popular opinion has probably damned Tiberius beyond rescue.

It would be obviously absurd in seeking to reconstruct the mode of composition used by an ancient writer for one to pretend to any exactness or precision of details, or to think it possible to dispense altogether with some guarded use of the imagination in establishing probabilities; but in a general way the method by which Tacitus produced his sketch of Tiberius may be inferred from inherent indications, and briefly sketched somewhat as follows. In making these surmises we should adopt as a general canon for determining

the probable order in which certain ideas were taken up by Tacitus, that this order of adoption is indicated by the relative completeness of the fusion of the idea with all the facts narrated. Limitations of space forbids me to attach supporting arguments to this outline.

His "color" was not fully developed when he began. Probably he started with the conception of Tiberius as cruel: the Romans were getting soft, and serving less and less in the army, were less familiar with the old severity of Roman discipline; but much of Tiberius' life had been passed in that school. His rigorous punishment of adultery, false accusations, and oppression by public officials seemed harsh to many noble culprits.¹ Furthermore, the cool-headed, far-sighted, self-controlled person, especially if disillusioned and somewhat dour, always seems to the impulsive and emotional to be cruel. Tiberius was unsympathetic and perhaps scornful to the decadent nobles and the pleasure-seeking crowd; hence he was deemed proud. He was probably the ablest man of his times, but the circumstances of his earlier life had developed much reserve in him; hence he seemed crafty, appallingly so to the sloppy minds of most of his contemporaries; and as he could see through their shallow schemes and silly flattery, he seemed suspicious.

From these attributes of Pride, Cruelty, Craftiness, and Suspicion, all characteristics of the Tyrant, Tacitus seems to have made certain generalizations, such as severity in administration of the criminal law, extension of the "*crimen majestatis*," encouragement of delation, etc. He then probably drew off from his sources a generally correct transcript for his narrative, slightly garbling it and adding innuendoes to endeavor to make it harmonize more completely with his "color." Duplicity and Dissimulation were of course the established devices for bringing rebellious facts into harmony with the desired result.

At this point probably we may assume that he went over his work and put in the embellishments "*secundum artem*"—protestations of veracity, spirited assertions of imperial despotism, punishment of careless words, remorseless pursuit of personal enemies, rage against critics, and the like, accompanying them with the suitable allegations of a face distorted by evil passions, or a mind filled with wicked thoughts. Some inventions were added where the narrative

¹ E.g., *Annals* ii. 50; iv. 31.

seemed to drag, and changes in phraseology were made in some places, so as to bring the facts into closer harmony with the theory. But still certain passages from the first state seem to have been too pleasing to his rhetorical taste to be sacrificed to the exigencies of a scientific demand for consistency.¹ The ancient mind was not, as we have observed, very intolerant of contradictions.

His artistic enthusiasm may be supposed to have grown with the joy of procreative activity, and to have warmed him toward his work—to have made him more venturesome and audacious. At any rate it appears highly probable that certain additions were made at an even later stage of the work; they are so incongruous and so detached from, and unsupported by, the other parts. We may not unreasonably suppose that he felt the need of following the rules of art and of keeping his readers' emotions stimulated. The characteristics of the typical Tyrant had not yet been exhausted by him, and seem to have suggested to him certain piquant developments of his color. We may infer his artistic enthusiasm from the very lurid character of some of these additions. A strong excitement was needed to push him to the point of attributing horrible Injustice, disgusting Sensuality, and blatant Anguish to Tiberius, the law-respecting old Roman of blameless life and dignified self-control. However, a few touches were added, such as Tiberius' attitude toward Cremutius Cordus,² the slaughter of Vitia for her tears, the Capri orgy, and the tyrant's groan of despair. The book was then published, fortunately for the cause of historical truth without that final revision which was necessary to bring all its parts into harmony with the various changes and insertions that had been made since it was first written out. The last chapter, at least in part, was added, or rewritten, and there was apparently a revision of the introductory part of the first book; but many most patent incongruities were left untouched in the body of the work. Perhaps this was due to haste; or perhaps Tacitus had become so suffused with his "color," that everything seemed to him harmoniously tinted—the critical faculty in relation to their own work sometimes fails artists for this reason

¹ E.g., *Ibid.* iv. 6-7; v. 1; iii. 52-55, 69. Some of these harmonizing attempts are conspicuously feeble, e.g., i. 75, 76; iv. 38.

² Cf. Seneca *Cons. ad Marc.* 1, 3-5, 15, 22.

—or perhaps he neglected that sage precept of Quintilian:¹ “The speaker ought to keep in mind what he has invented, since what is not true is apt to be forgotten, and the common saying is just, that a liar ought to have a good memory.”

In some such way as this a great literary creation was made, which, however unreal as a piece of history, has impressed itself on the imagination of the world with a strength that modern criticism has done little to weaken; and so the artistic heritage of mankind, together with its Hamlet and King Lear, its Don Quixote and Mephistopheles, contains the imposing figure of the Tacitean Tiberius.

CAPRI

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¹ Quintilian iv. 2. 91.